



L. SIMONSON • BATISTA • FABER

STEEL

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~ HaCsA ~ nom de plume ~

THE GREAT STEEL



BUT
ENJOYABLE
AS THIS LI'L
FANDANGO
HAS BEEN...

...YOU RIN'T
STOPPED
DE'CINE FROM
DROPPIN' HIS ROPE
ON MAXIMA.

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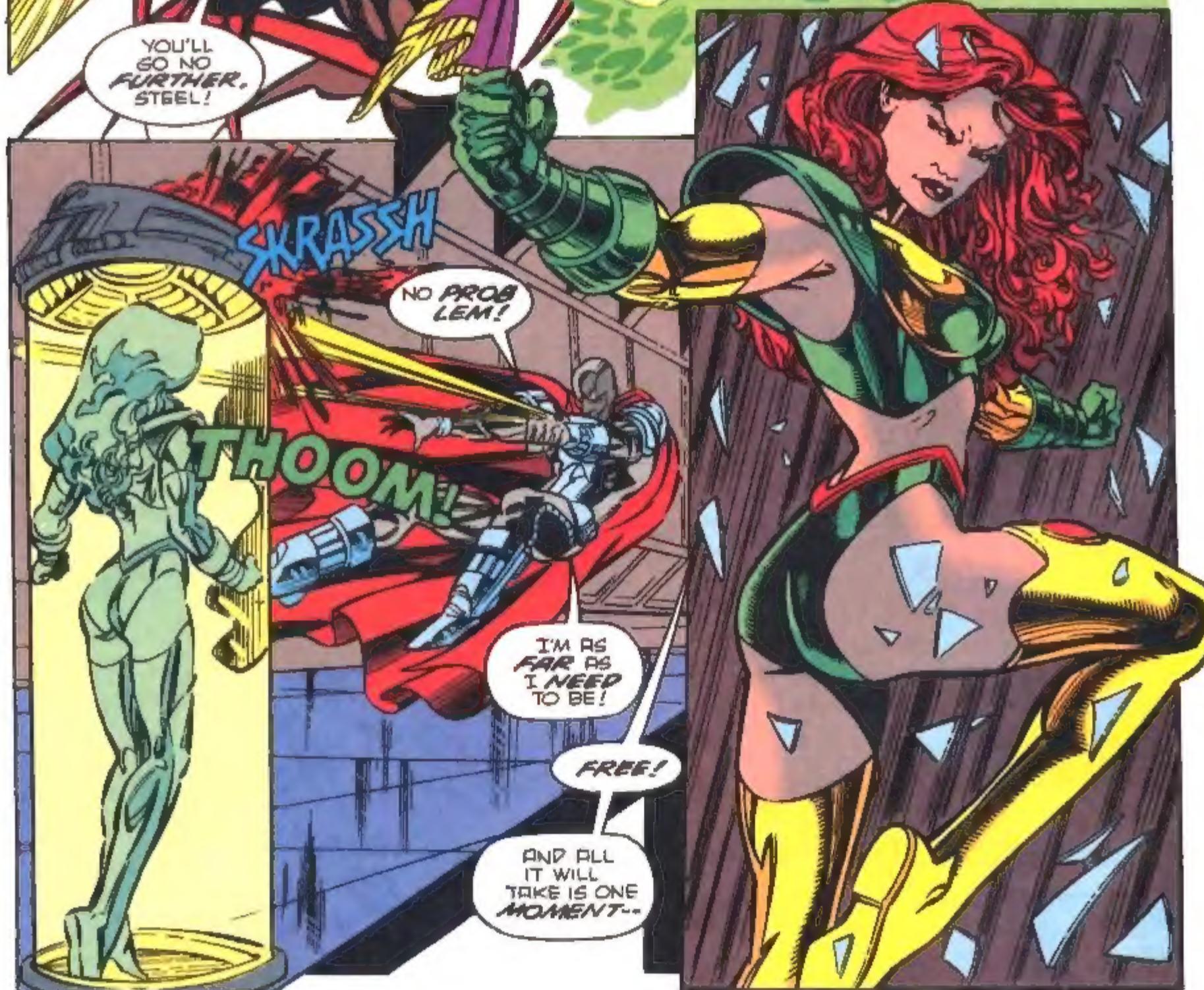
Steel created by Louise Simonson
and Jon Bogdanove



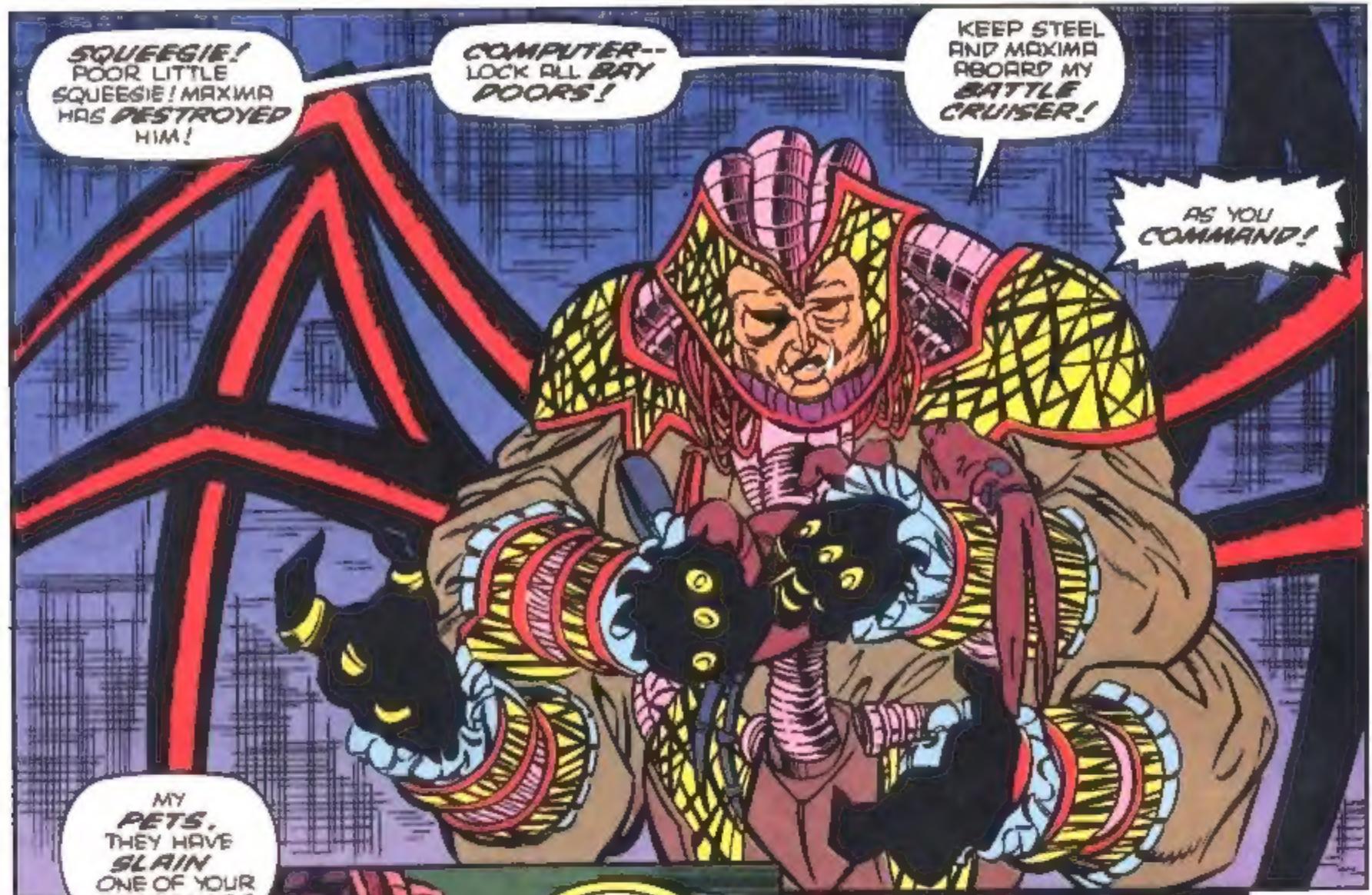
-- BY VIRTUE OF THE
SACRED **POWER**
INVESTED IN ME BY THE
COUNCIL OF RAHRAN --

-- I NOW
PRONOUNCE
YOU --









LISTEN!
TECH'TRA'S
CREATURES
ARE BAYING
AFTER US!

WE ARE
THERE!
DOOR--
OPEN!

I'M SORRY!
I AM NO LONGER
PROGRAMMED TO
OBEY THAT COM-
MAND!

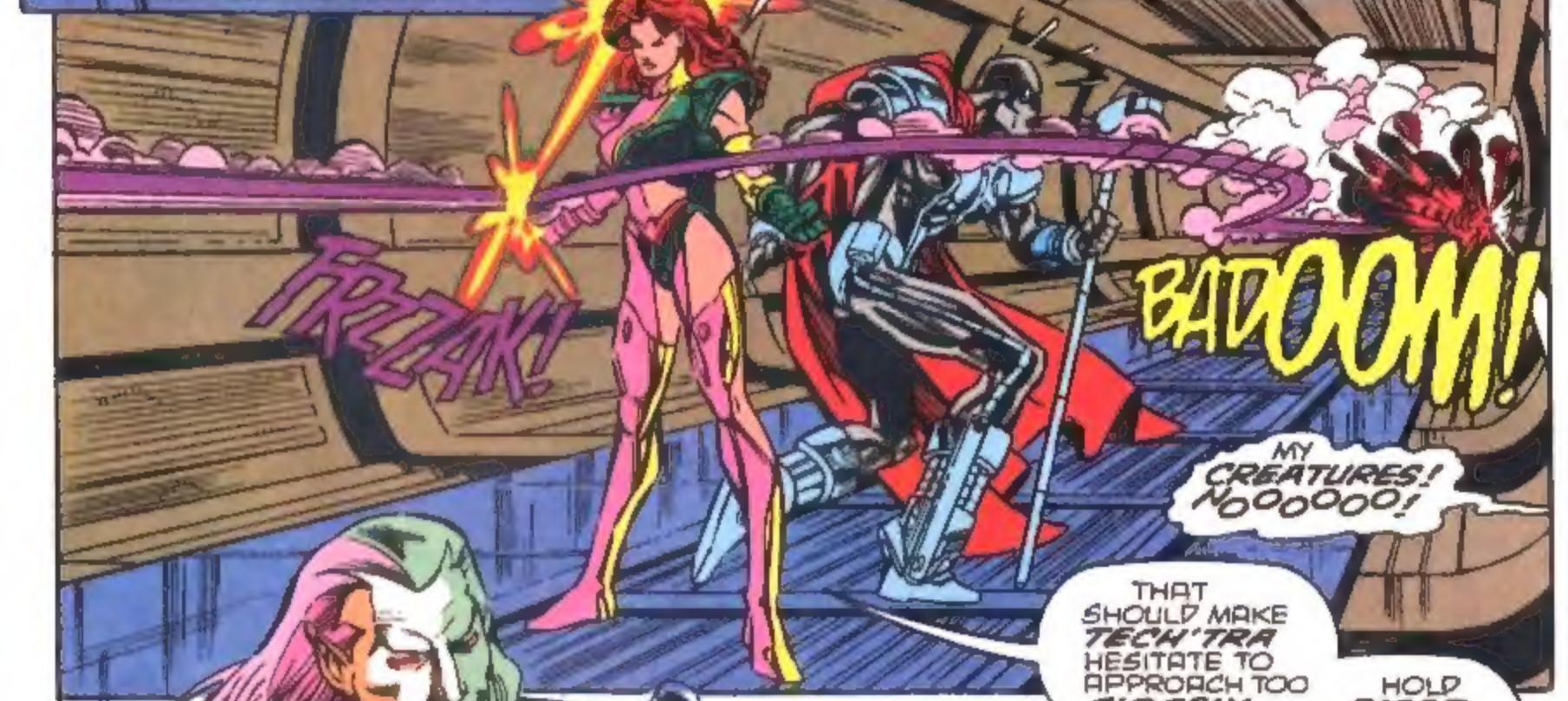
WHAT
NOW? IF
WE CAN'T
GO FOR-
WARD--

THERE'S
NO TURNIN'
BACK FER YA
NEITHER!

FACE IT!
YER CAUGHT
LIKE WEASELS
IN A TRAP!

AHM
RIGHT
BEHIND
YA...

AN' THIS
LITTLE PER-
SHOOTER'S
GOT ARMOR-
PIERCIN'
SHELLS!



THOOM! THOOM!

HAVE ONE
CHANCE!

IF I CAN
LODGE A
RIVET IN
THE BARREL
OF HIS
CANNON--

THWAK! THWAK!

MY
GUN!

KRAKOM!

ONE
DOWN AT
LEAST TEMPORARILY!
HOW'S THE
DOOR
COMING?

TIME,
HUUH?
LOOKS LIKE
OUR TIME
HAS JUST
ABOUT RUN
OUT!

IT IS
WEAKEN-
ING!

AND IN
TIME
I WILL
PRE-
VAIL!

BLAM!

WRAM

BLAM!

THAT
WEAPON HAS
BEEN SPEC FICALLY
DESIGNED TO
SLAUGHTER
ALMERRACIANS
MY SON!

WHAT
IS THE
PROB-
LEM?

STEEL IS
DELIBERATELY
SHIELDING
MAXIMA WITH
HIS ARMOR!

KRAKOM!

IT IS
OPEN!
I HAVE
WON!

CONGRAT-
ULATIONS!
LET'S GET OUT
OF HERE!

SHAKA POW!

SOUNDS
LIKE
THEY'RE
RIGHT
BEHIND
US!

NOT
ANY-
MORE!

I'VE
BROUGHT
DOWN THE
CEILING!

IT WILL
TAKE THEM
A WHILE TO
CLAMBER
THROUGH THE
RUBBLE AND
SEE WHAT'S
BEYOND!

"THE
BRIDGE!"

YOU
CAN FLY
THIS
SUCKER?

COME ON!
HURRY!
LET'S GO TO...

OF
COURSE.

WE
ALMERACIANS
MAKE IT A
POLICY TO
STUDY THE
DESIGNS OF OUR
ENEMIES...

YOU
NEVER
KNOW WHEN
THE KNOWL-
EDGE WILL
PROVE USE-
FUL.

WE'VE
DISEN-
GAGED.

CAN
THEY
FOLLOW
US,
MAXMR?

"NOT IMMEDIATELY
AT ANY RATE. I LEFT
THEM A DIVERSION."

"A DIVERSION?"

"WHEN I DISENGAGED,
I LEFT THE BAY OF TECH'TRA'S
SHIP WIDE OPEN! THEY'RE
CAUGHT IN THE MIDST OF --"

EXPLOSIVE
DECOMPRESSION!
WE'RE BEING
SUCKED INTO
SPACE!

MOTHER!
QUICKLY! ACTI-
VATE THE MAG-
NETIC MECHANISM
IN YOUR LEGS!

DONE!
AND HOW
FARES MY
DARLING
B'RAD?

UNCONSCIOUS
BUT ALIVE WE'LL
REACH A SECURE
SECTION AND--LOOK
BELOW!

MY
YACHT--
THEY'RE
WARPING
AWAY

"BY THE MAKERS
GRUNTLETS, MY SON!
WHERE CAN THEY
HAVE GONE?"

WHERE
ELSE.
DEREST
MOTHER

"...BUT TO EARTH?"

HOW IS YOUR ARMOR?

ALMOST GOOD AS MINE.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING ON EARTH MAXIMA? YOU'RE A PRINCESS...

WITH A POTENTIAL EMPIRE TO RULE

I FIRST CAME TO EARTH TO FORCE SUPERMAN TO MARRY ME

HE WAS THE MOST MAGNIFICENT MAN I HAD EVER SEEN

AND ALMERACIAN ROYALTY ALWAYS WEDS THE BEST.

YOU FIND THAT AMUSING ...?



I GUESS IT JUST SHOWS YOUR GOOD TASTE.

WHEN A REVOLUTION FORCED MY FAMILY FROM THE THRONE.

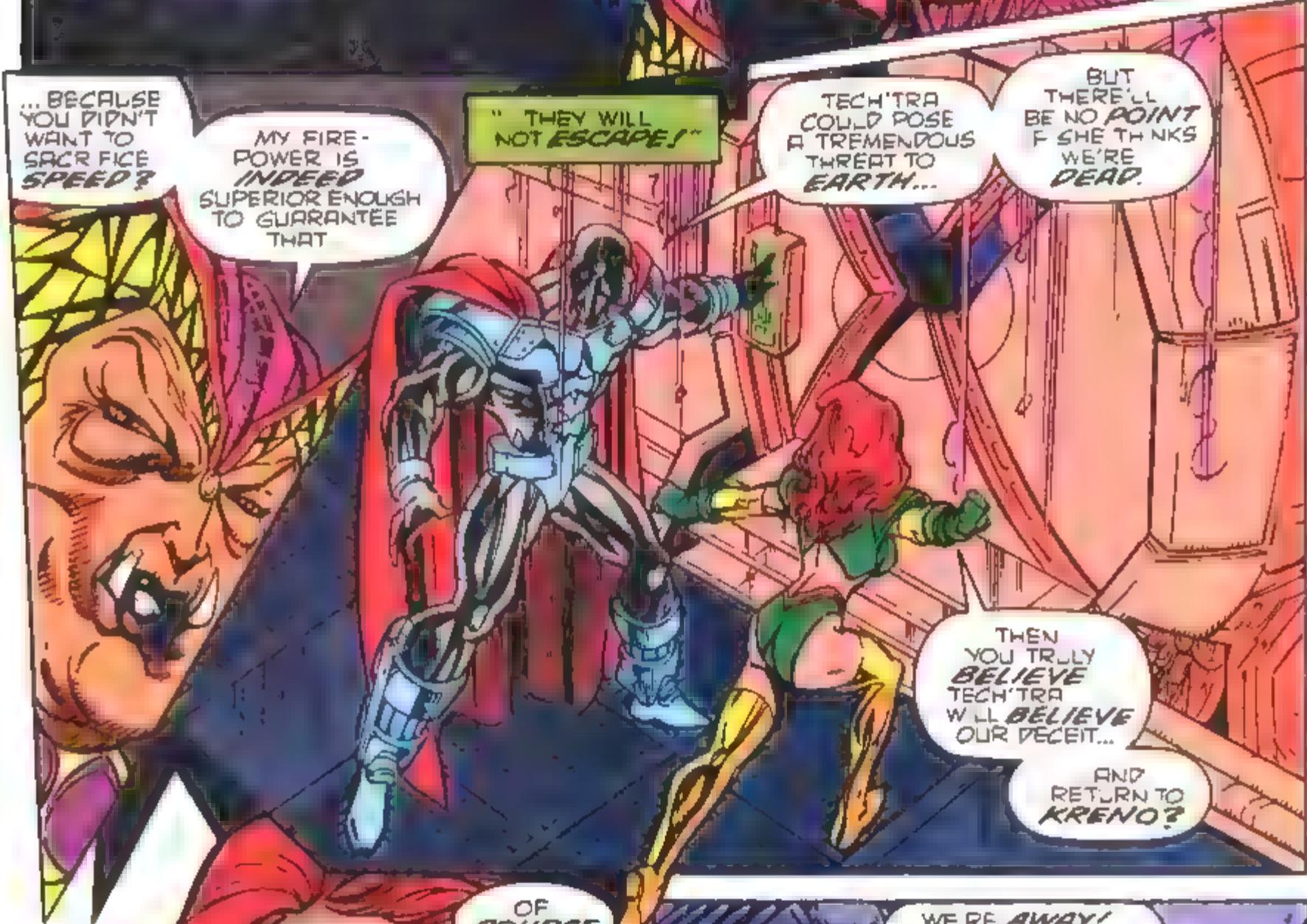
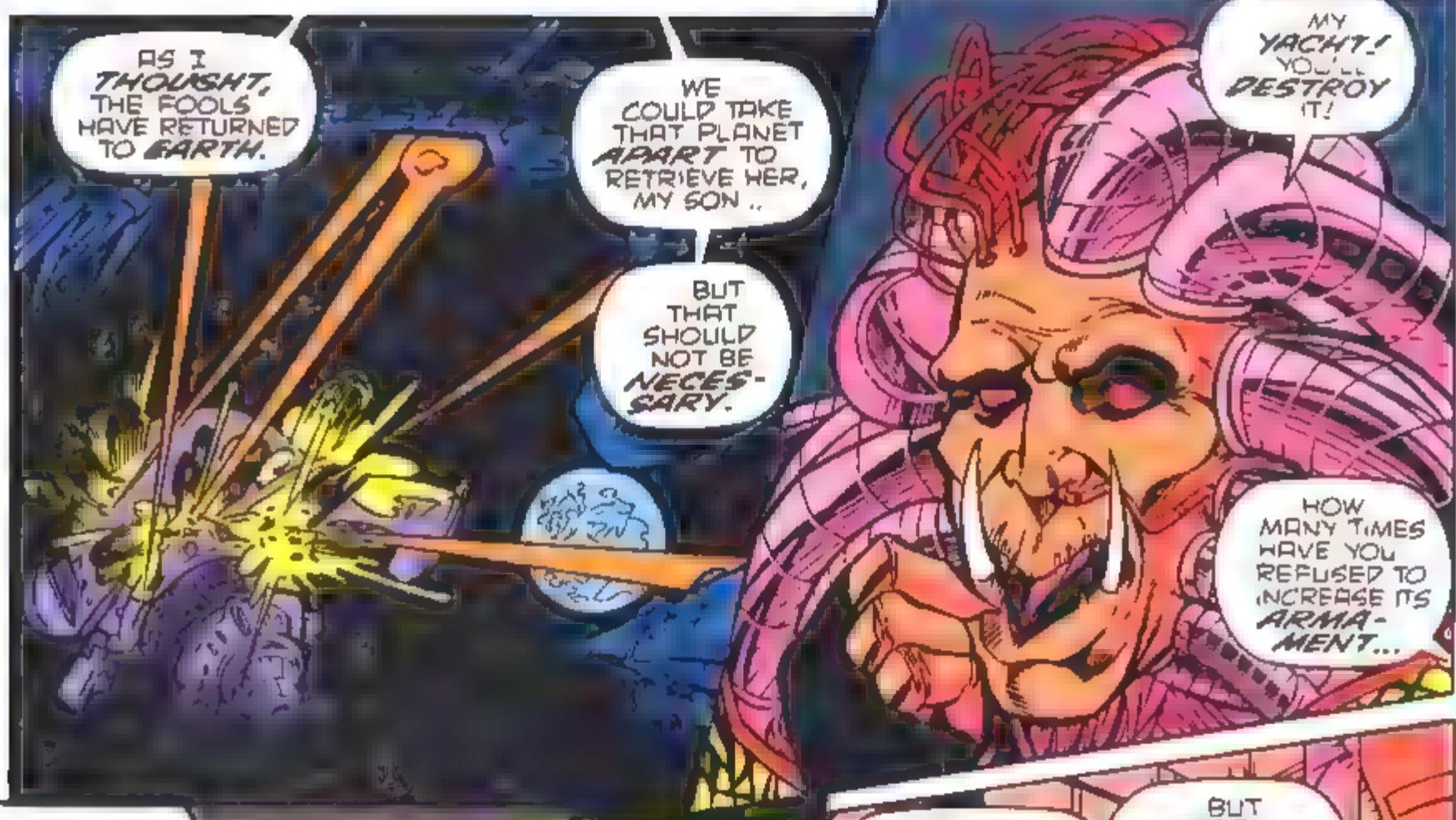
I WAS CAPTURED BY BRAINIAC AND BROUGHT HERE

ONCE HE WAS DEFEATED, I CHOSE TO REMAIN...

QUEEN TECH'TRA'S BATTLE CRUISER HAS JUST WARPED INTO NEARBY SPACE

I SUPPOSE IT WAS TOO MUCH TO HOPE THAT WE HAD LOST HER







THAT AVENUE TO CONTROL OF ALMERAC IS NOW CLOSED TO US. MY SON

WE WILL HAVE TO FIND ANOTHER WAY

FOR NOW, IT'S BEST THAT WE RETURN TO OUR OWN EMPIRE.

LOOK, MAXIMA! TECHTRA'S SHIP HAS WARPED AWAY FROM EARTH!

THEY BELIEVED OUR SLISTER-FUGE! IT WORKED! EARTH'S SAVED!

AND DE'CINE PAID FOR HIS IMPERTINENCE WITH HIS PRIZE RACING YACHT!

LOOK, MAX! ON THE SCREEN! A LARGE CHUNK OF DEBRIS!

"STEEL--I CAN NOT MANEUVER AWAY IN TIME!"

IT PLUNCHED A HOLE IN THE SIDE OF THE POD!

GET YOUR BREATHING MASK ON THEN AND THANK HEAVEN FOR TELEPATHIC COMMUNICATION!

THERE'S NOT MUCH AIR LEFT INSIDE MY TANKS

I LEFT MY SHIP IN ORBIT NEARBY HURRY!

AIR SUPPLIES REAL LOW.

DO NOT WORRY. STEEL! MY SHIP SHOULD BE IN ORBIT WHERE I LEFT--

IT IS NOT HERE! BUT THESE ARE THE COORDINATES! WHERE CAN IT BE?

STEEL RISKED HIS LIFE TO AID ME TIME AND AGAIN I CANNOT LET HIM DIE NOW

IF I DIVE WITH HM INTO THE ATMOSPHERE, WOULD HIS ARMOR PROTECT HM?

OR WOULD HE BURN? IF I DO NOT LOCATE IT SOON, I MUST TAKE THE RISK--

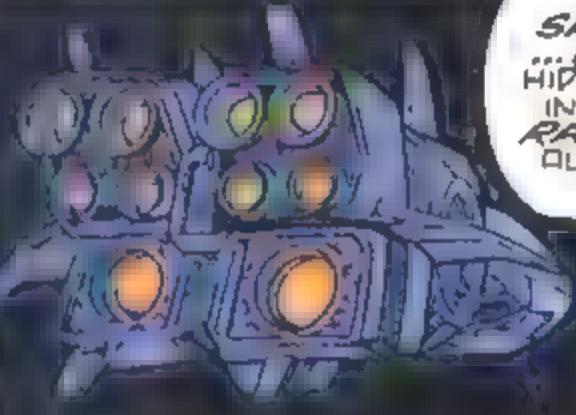
MAXIMA! ARE YOU THERE? I'M THINKING AS LOUD AS I CAN, DARN IT! ANSWER ME!

STAY THERE! WAIT FOR US! WE'RE COMING TO GET YOU

BEETLE! WE ARE HERE! STEEL'S ALMOST OUT OF AIR.

STEEL! I JUST HEARD BLUE BEETLE'S VOICE!



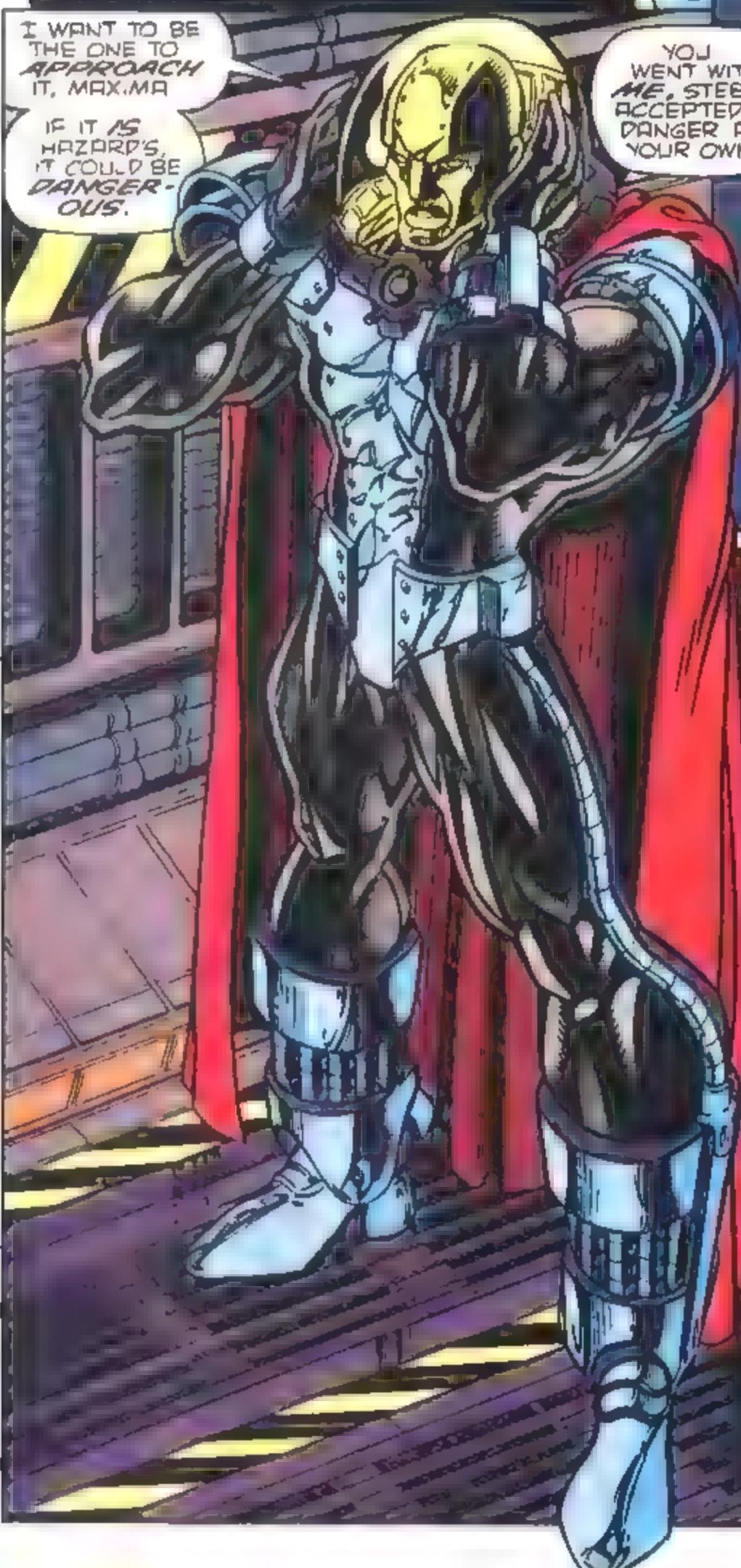


IT'S A
SATELLITE
... EXPERTLY
HIDDEN. VIRTUALLY
INVISIBLE TO
RADAR... AND
ALMOST INVISIBLE
TO SIGHT



IT
SEEMS
TO BE
SENDING
OUT IN-
FORMA-
TION...

BUT, I CAN'T
TELL WHERE
IT'S BEAMING,
OR, WHAT KIND
OF INFO IT'S
SENDING



I WANT TO BE
THE ONE TO
APPROACH
IT, MAX. MA

IF IT IS
HAZARD'S,
IT COULD BE
DANGER-
OUS.



YOU
WENT WITH
ME. STEEL
ACCEPTED MY
DANGER AS
YOUR OWN.

"... AND
NOW I
WILL GO
WITH
YOU."



THE LIGHT
IS BEING
DEFRACTED...
BENT AROUND
THE SATELLITE.

THAT
IS WHY IT
IS VIRTUALLY
IMPOSSIBLE
TO SEE

WHO-
EVER DID
THIS, HIS
USE OF
TECH-
NOLOGY
IS BRIL-
LIANT

BRILLIANT...
AND IF IT IS
HAZARD'S, IT WILL
BE DEADLY.

HOW
WILL YOU
KNOW
WHOSE
IT IS?

I'M...
NOT
SURE.

BUT IF IT
IS, AS I
SUSPECT,
HIS SPY
SATEL-
LITE...

... IN TIME
I'LL BE ABLE
TO TRACK ITS
TRANSMISSIONS
AND LOCATE
HIS HEAD-
QUARTERS.

NO! DO
NOT GO ANY
CLOSER! IT IS
SHIELDED... EVEN
TO TELEPATHIC
PROBES...

... BUT I
CAN FEEL
THAT IT IS--

--BOOBY-
TRAPPED!

WHEN
YOU'RE RIGHT,
YOU'RE RIGHT!
IT'S HAZARD'S
ALL RIGHT, HIS M.O.
EXACTLY.

THIS
SEEMS TO
BE OUR DAY
TO HAVE
THINGS BLOW
UP IN OUR
FACES!



...I SUPPOSE YOU'LL GET AROUND TO TELLING US WHAT HAPPENED EARLIER.

EVENTUALLY, PERHAPS. WHAT HAPPENED SHOULD NOT HAVE HAPPENED.

IT SEEMS THAT MY ASSOCIATION WITH HUMAN-KIND HAD MADE ME SOFT. I SHOULD NOT HAVE NEEDED "SAVING."

WELL, YOU GAVE IT YOUR BEST SHOT AND THEN SOME...

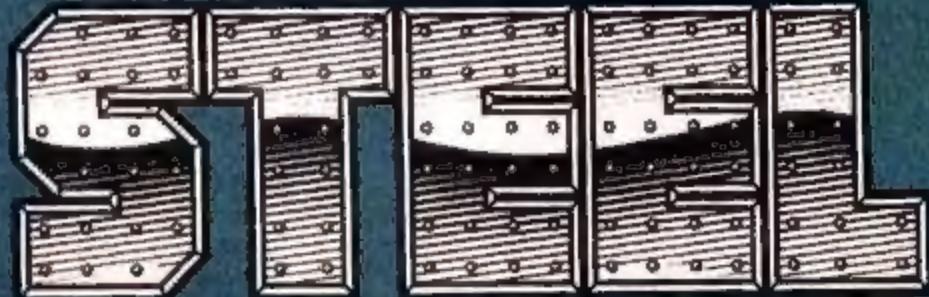
...BUT, STEEL, IT LOOKS LIKE HAZARD DOESN'T WANT TO BE FOUND.

STILL... IT WAS HAZARD WHO I SET OUT TO FIND IN THE FIRST PLACE!

YOU TRIED TO STOP ONE VILLAIN, MY FRIEND, AND SAVED YOUR EARTH FROM ANOTHER.

FOR NOW, YOU MUST BE CONTENT WITH THAT.

END



PREVIOUSLY IN STEEL: Steel and Maxima have been taken hostage aboard a Krenon spaceship. Maxima is about to be forced into marrying De'cine, a hideous alien with plans to conquer Almerac. Maxima's home planet. Steel, because of the anomalies in his armor, is believed to be a cyborg. If this proves true, De'cine intends to present Steel to his mother, Techtra, to add to her cyborg "collection." If, however, Steel is not a cyborg, then he will be terminated by De'cine's partner, B'add, a Krenon who, oddly, has modelled himself after a wild-west cowboy of Earth.

Dear Steelworkers,

STEEL #0 is, bar none, the best issue of STEEL I have ever read. I greatly enjoyed your showing several flashbacks to John Henry's past, such as scenes from his childhood, how he ended up working for Amertek and created the Toastmasters, and how he made the decision to use his skills to become the Man of Steel. I also enjoyed his battle with Black Ops, and the way Steel's armor displayed unusual powers. I wonder if the powers have something to do with the fact that Steel got that armor from Dakota in the "Worlds Collide" saga.

Hazard must have an entire arsenal of metahumans since he had some new super-villains with him this time, but it seems like Split and Shellshock have become recurring characters. I think that you should make Hazard break Bloodsport out of prison and send him against Steel. I mean, Bloodsport is racist, and he would prove a dangerous foe against Steel and D.C.'s hoods. Think about it.

And when will John Henry decide to get a job as a steelworker to help out his family? In fact, it would be an interesting story for John Henry, not Steel, to find himself some saboteurs from atop a construction site. Think about that, also.

Daniel McCaffery
Chesapeake City, MD

John's not heading back to the high steel any time soon, Daniel. Right now, most of the Irons family bills are being paid by the money John made working for Amertek (John's actually pretty wealthy right now). Also, we can assume that the

house is paid for, the kids go to public school, Butter and Bess are probably old enough to collect social security, and Blondell is bringing in some money from her job (whatever that is). And Tyke is a foster child, so at least some of his expenses are paid for by the state.

A few letters have come in asking for Bloodsport, so we'll see.

And that was a good guess you had for solving the mystery of Steel's armor. Right now it's as valid an explanation as any, although an unlikely one. All the answers will be along shortly.



Dear Editor,
Re: STEEL #0

What happened to the suit? It's been a question since we first met him...is John Henry Irons a metahuman or not? Now, at last, it becomes clear that either he is a metahuman, or he built some things into that armor that even he didn't know about (which would qualify him as a metahuman anyway). A nice recap of what has gone before, and some nice setup for what will be coming up.

All in all, an okay issue for people coming on board, but a pretty slow issue for those of us who have been with him for the long version of this month's story...the one that took place over the last seven issues.

Norman Barth
Fresh Meadows, NY

That was pretty much the point of all the zero issues...to provide easy access points to the entire DC Universe lineup — to recap, refresh, and review. At the same time, we threw in a hook for the readers who have been around since day one. Is Steel a metahuman? Is his armor sentient? Is it possessed? Is Steel possessed? Or is someone manipulating Steel from behind the scenes? Someone with his or her own agenda? Stick around and find out!



Dear Frank,

I've really been enjoying STEEL, but I have some concerns about the book's future. From what I understand, plans are for Steel, after ZERO HOUR, to discover he has the power to summon his armor at will, and then perhaps journey into space. While I think it's a good idea for Steel

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to go out into the larger DC Universe for a bit, I'm worried that this book will lose the realism and more down-to-earth feeling it has if Steel gains superpowers. Sure, superpowers are cool, the fanboys dig them, but once Steel gets any power that a human in the real world couldn't have, the book will never be the same, even if he's placed in the most realistic of situations. When the reader reads a story about Batman, Robin, or Steel, in his present state, there's something that makes the story more meaningful, because that could be any person, were they driven to it.

By the time this letter sees print, these changes will probably have already occurred, and I'll still be reading this title faithfully, but I hope you keep in mind some of the things that drew people to STEEL in the beginning before making any further drastic changes in the character.

I also have some questions about Steel that don't seem to be explainable.

1) How does Steel's mask change facial expressions? It's solid steel!

2) Where does he keep the hammer which seems to pop out of nowhere every once in a while?

3) What fuels his booster jets which enable him to fly?

4) Where is his fuel stored?

5) How does he pay for this fuel? Something powerful enough to lift all that steel so far into the sky must cost a lot, and he must go through a lot of it.

Maybe I'm being a bit nit-picky and silly, but these are things that I can't help wondering about when reading your book!

Jacob Huebert
North Lima, OH

I took the liberty of combining two of your letters into one big one, because you covered a lot of what readers seem to be curious about. First, the answers to your questions...

1) His mask's facial expressions are definitely tied to the armor mystery...and we'll learn more as John does. Or maybe John just has really strong facial muscles! (Only kidding!)

2) The hammer (which has an extendable handle) is magnetized, and John keeps it attached to his back, under his cape. The best shot of this is in issue #3, page 8, although from time to time it's shown up elsewhere.

3) This hasn't been explored, but it's safe to assume that the jets are powered by plain old rocket fuel (that John may have "enhanced" somehow). There's also a possibility that, since we've never seen him run out of fuel, that this is also connected to the strange properties of his armor.

4) The fuel is stored in his hip compartments, runs down the tubing on his legs and through the gear in his boots, where it's ignited, sending him up, up, and away.

5) See the response to this month's first letter for the financial answer you're looking for. As for the weight/fuel ratio...it might be expensive...or it might not, depending on how many of the armor's attributes are artificial and not some aspect of latent powers John may or may not have.

Regarding those powers, Jacob, I know exactly where you're coming from, but I tend to disagree about the reality part. Steel wears armor. He *flies*. He's already got both feet planted firmly in the realm of fantasy. I get your point about the readers being able to identify with him, but I think that, even if John Henry became Putty-Man (and he will), as long as he remains in character and stays true to himself, there's been no betrayal (for lack of a better word) of the character or the series. The identifiability comes into play not as "this guy has no powers, so I could be him," but instead, "this guy just got powers, and he's acting just like I would." I suppose it's all a matter of perspective. Let us know what you think in the coming months as we, and John, explore this new power and the blessing or curse that it may turn out to be. Thanks for writing!



Dear Editor,

I've never written to a comic before, though I taught myself to read as a boy of five. I just had to know what was in those word balloons, comics being my only visual entertainment. Dad was in the military, stationed overseas, me with him. English television wasn't available, but we got a couple of English radio stations. Theater of the mind was my theater, so I've been in the DC Universe for awhile. It's a wild and wonderful place. It strengthens the power of imagination, and it's somewhere I can go every week. Anyway, it's given me a great deal of enjoyment to be there with my favorite DC characters and cheer for the good guys. Like other readers I've put my detective skills to the test, to find out quite often I'm correct in my predictions of what's to come or who's involved. The only thing is, I always mention it after the fact, so I thought just for fun that I'd write in before the next issue to see how far out to lunch I am. Here goes...

In STEEL #0, page 18, Hazard is

about to murder John Henry when, "SHRAKKT! BDOOW!" the armor appears to protect him, only he has no idea how or why. But I have some ideas of my own.

When you go back to the battle at Engine City in ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN #505, there were two beings involved who might be responsible. One is Supergirl, the other is Hank Henshaw. Hank Henshaw's power to inhabit machines and metals is incomprehensible, and I'm thinking that as Superman vibrated the cyborg to pieces, Henshaw didn't stick around. It's possible that he left Engine City in Steel's armor, undetected even by Hal Jordan's ring in GREEN LANTERN #46. Henshaw showed Mongul he can do this when he "jumped" into a technical system to avoid being killed in SUPERMAN #81, page 13.

Supergirl comes in when she restores Steel's armor. She did the same thing that she did for Superman's trashed costume: "A telekinetic realignment of those tatters will truly finish things." I figure Henshaw was in the armor while it was still badly trashed. When Supergirl "reconstructed" the armor, using her abilities, she had to borrow material from her surroundings to fill in the gaps. In an unexpected twist, Henshaw may have found himself trapped by an alien structural design that Supergirl imposed on him. Supergirl's telekinetic reconstruction of the armor might have unwittingly created a prison that holds the essence of what is Hank Henshaw, at the subatomic level.

Even though John Henry reforged and pounded on that armor in STEEL #1, it goes beyond his "blueprint," simply because Supergirl "reengineered" it for him. If this is the case, there's no doubt that, eventually, Henshaw will find a way to confront Superman again. What better place to strike than from Steel's armor, where (for now) he's safe and hidden?

It has also occurred to me that Hank Henshaw might actually be dead, and that Supergirl is the sole reason for Steel's very protective armor. Supergirl is an artificial life form, commanding unimaginable forces. Since the armor's repair comes from her subconscious power of will, it's possible that she leaves an infinitesimal part of herself as the foundation of what this new armor is. The fact that Supergirl lives and breathes ensures the integrity of the armor, which (in her mind) only John Henry is supposed to wear, has formed a subconscious psychokinetic link. Supergirl probably doesn't know she's doing it, but a fear signal from John Henry might have caused Supergirl to envision Steel in her mind, actually putting the armor back on him at the critical moment Hazard fired on him.

The only other thing I can think of is that Henshaw's inhabiting the

armor may have left some signature life force without sentient direction. S-Girl's powers, imposed on the armor, might have evolved this condition, producing an armor that has become symbiotic.

And I don't know if it was a lead or not, but in the STEEL #6 lettercolumn, you said, "...we hope that in the coming months the new armor will grow on you as much as it will John Henry..."

So, now that you figure I'm dumber than a bag of hammers, I just thought I'd ask. What is a Baldy? And have I come even remotely close with this?

Bruce Bonnell
Ontario, Canada

A Baldy is one of life's great mysteries, and only we here at DC, and a select few SUPERMAN readers know what they truly are. Oh, and Bigfoot. Bigfoot knows.

As for your incredible piece of detective work, all I can say is, well...good work and keep detecting! Everything sounds plausible. Hank could have "morphed" or merged with Steel's armor. And Supergirl certainly may have "helped" John's suit. But Hank turned up, very much alive and more dangerous than ever, in last year's three-issue miniseries SUPERMAN/DOOMSDAY: HUNTER/PREY, and boy, did he give Supes a headache.

And if Supergirl did fix Steel's armor, it would've been by manipulating its molecules. No part of her essence would have transferred over. No psychic bond would have been formed.

Regardless, your theories were very, very cool (I wish we'd thought of 'em). But as Steel's armor continues to behave strangely, he just may wish that he had Hank to face instead. That, I'm afraid, may be far less painful.



NEXT ISSUE: Following the events in SUPERMAN #99, John Henry Irons teams up with the real steel deal! Superman and Steel must fight side by side to take down Bomb, an explosive menace with plans to destroy Washington...but there's more to this being than meets the eye...and in defeating him Steel will open up a door in his life that he thought he'd closed forever.

OVER IN SUPERBOY: The stakes have been raised in The Kid's fight against the Silicon Dragons, as Superboy finds himself allied with Knockout, Captain Boomerang, Deadshot, Sidearm, and King Shark. It's a suicide mission in three parts that you won't want to miss. Check out "Watery Grave" Part One in SUPERBOY #13, still on sale!

Frank Pittarrese
—Gettin' late, gotta go